

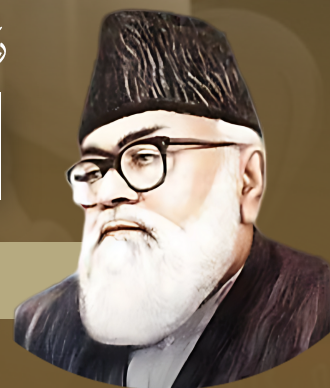
An Important **RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT**

THE MISSION OF MAULANA ILYAS

رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ
SYED MAUDUDI

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Sama-O-Basr

لَوْجِهَ اَللّٰهِ لَا تُرَبِّدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكُورًا

Only for Allah's pleasure! We neither seek reward from you nor thanks.

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Foreword



The essay you are about to read – “*An Important Religious Movement*” – was written by Maulana Abul A’la Maududi in **October 1939** at a time of acute religious, social, and moral disintegration among the Muslims of India. In this remarkable piece, Maulana presents both an eyewitness account and a timeless blueprint for religious revival. His observations of the Meo community of Mewat, and of the quiet yet transformative efforts of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, illuminate principles of reform that remain profoundly relevant for our own age.

Maulana Maududi begins by describing the dire pre-reform condition of the Meo people—religiously ignorant, socially fragmented, culturally influenced by pre-Islamic practices, and morally adrift. Yet, within a decade of sustained grassroots work, the same community was transformed into a society of praying, learning, morally upright Muslims. The mosques were revived, villages became peaceful, crime diminished, tribal feuds cooled, and ordinary men – once themselves lost – became sincere callers to the path of God.

From this transformation, Maulana distills eight foundational principles of Islamic revival. He emphasizes that reform must begin where the Prophet ﷺ began: with the Kalima, with awakening faith before legislating law, with cultivating conviction before demanding compliance. He warns against the modern tendency to rely on showy organizations, loud slogans, uniforms, parades, or *publicity-driven* activism. True and lasting change, he argues, comes from sincere and persistent efforts, grounded in knowledge, humility, and direct engagement with the people.

Maulana further stresses working locally and avoiding *premature* attempts to create large, centralized bodies that outpace human and spiritual capacity. He advocates small circles (or units) of sincere workers, cooperating organically, each calling people to Islam in their immediate environment. He highlights the special suitability of rural populations, where simplicity of heart makes people more receptive to sincere religious counsel.

Importantly, Maulana reminds us that the message of Islam is universal. Its invitation must reach non-Muslims, but this requires removing mutual hostilities, elevating Muslim character, and eliminating caste-like prejudices within the Muslim community itself. A Muslim's daily behavior—honesty, compassion, purity, justice, dignity—must itself become a form of da'wah.

One of the most significant—and often overlooked—insights in this article is Maulana's view that *such grassroots spiritual and moral reform is not the end, but rather the beginning*. He lays out a vision in which the revival of faith, discipline, and moral life prepares the ground for the next stages:

- the spread of knowledge,
- development of political awareness,
- economic uplift,
- social organization,
- and ultimately, the establishment of a righteous and just social order rooted in Islamic principles.

In other words, *Maulana sees moral and individual reform as the necessary groundwork for the larger mission of Iqāmat-e-Dīn*—establishing the way of God in personal and collective life. Without individuals who are purified, disciplined, sincere, and grounded in the *Kalima*, the higher responsibilities of social transformation remain impossible. With such individuals, they become not only possible but naturally achievable.

This foreword would be incomplete without emphasizing a point deeply compatible with Maulana's vision: *Islamic organizations and movements must support one another in the broader struggle for Islamic revival.*

Competition, isolation, or organizational ego harms the Ummah. Cooperation, mutual reinforcement, and shared humility strengthen it. Maulana's emphasis on sincerity over showmanship, on natural unity over artificial structures, provides a powerful reminder that the success of any Islamic work ultimately rests on collective integrity, not branding or organizational size.

This translation of Maulana Maududi's historic article is being published by **iCAN Sama-O-Basr Publications**, with the intention that its insights may once again illuminate our contemporary challenges. The hope is that this work will not remain a relic of history, but will serve as a living guide, inspiring Muslims, organizations, scholars, and activists to adopt the Prophetic method: gradual, sincere, disciplined, God-centered, people-focused, and spiritually transformative.

May Allah grant this humble effort acceptance and make it a means of reviving hearts, uplifting communities, and advancing the noble mission of *Iqāmat-e-Dīn*.

Editor,
iCAN Sama-O-Basr Publications
January 27, 2026

A Journey to Witness a Quiet Transformation



Last month, towards the end of Rajab, I happened to travel to a region near Delhi which is known by the name Mewat¹. For a long time I had been hearing that under the guidance of *Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi*², a quiet but steady movement had been taking shape there, and within ten or

¹ Mewat refers to a historical region in North India spanning parts of present-day Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. It is traditionally inhabited by the Meo (or Mewati) people – an Indo-Muslim community with a distinct cultural and linguistic heritage.

Hindu-Muslim tensions in the region, especially around the Partition of India in 1947, led to significant displacement and violence, including attacks on Meo settlements by Hindu extremists and subsequent reprisals. Many Meos temporarily fled their homes during this period, often under pressure from local princely states, but later returned and again formed a demographic majority in much of Mewat. The religious revival efforts of the Tablighi Jamaat and other *da'wah* movements played an important role in re-organizing and re-strengthening the community's Islamic identity in the decades that followed.

² Maulana Muhammad Ilyas ibn Muhammad Isma'il Kandhlawi (1885–1944) was an Indian Islamic scholar and the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat in the early 1920s.

His Education: He received his earliest education in local *maktabs*, memorising the Qur'an first under local teachers and completing it under the supervision of his father in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi. He studied the foundational texts of Arabic and Persian primarily under his father, and later continued his studies under the eminent scholar Shaykh Rashid Ahmad Gangohi until the latter's passing in 1905. In 1908, Maulana Ilyas enrolled at Darul Uloom Deoband, where he studied under leading scholars of the time, including Shaykh al-Hind Maulana Mahmud Hasan Deobandi.

Foundation of Tablighi Jamaat: In the early 1920s, he organised a group of young graduates from the seminaries of Deoband and Saharanpur and sent them to Mewat to establish mosques, *maktabs*, and a system of regular religious instruction. Although people later came to call the movement *Tableeghi*, Maulana Ilyas once remarked that, if he were to choose a name, it would be "*Tehreek-e-Imaan*" (The Movement of Faith).

From its modest beginnings in Mewat, the Tablighi Jamaat eventually developed into one of the world's most widespread grassroots Islamic movements, with followers and activities across many regions, including South Asia, Australia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and North America.

twelve years it had transformed the entire region. Ultimately, the desire for first-hand knowledge compelled me to go myself and investigate the conditions there. What I saw during that journey, and the conclusions I derived from it, I wish to share with the readers of *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, so that the servants of God who sincerely desire to work for His cause may find in it a clear path for action.

The Meo Community Before the Reform Movement



The Meo community³ is settled around Delhi—in the districts of Alwar, Bharatpur, Gurgaon, and other adjoining areas. It is estimated that their total population is not less than thirty-six lakhs. Centuries ago, *perhaps* through the efforts of Hazrat Nizamuddin Mahbub-e-Ilahi (رحمہ اللہ) and his deputies and appointed workers, Islam had reached this community. But, unfortunately, in later periods, due to the negligence of Muslim rulers and landlords, no

³ Meo (pronounced *mev* or *may-o*, also spelled *Mayo*) refers to a Muslim ethnic community historically associated with the Mewat region of north-western India. The term “Meo” is closely tied to this region and is often used interchangeably with “Mewati” for ethnic identification. Importantly, the term applies specifically to the Muslim inhabitants of Mewat; Hindu residents of the same area—despite sharing similar Kshatriya lineage in many cases—are *not* called Meo. Thus, the designation is both region-specific and religion-specific.

The Meos traditionally regard themselves as descending from Rajput clans, and many historians suggest that significant parts of the community embraced Islam between the 11th and 17th centuries, continuing into the Mughal period. Their conversion is commonly linked to the influence of early Sufi figures, particularly Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud, nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni. Over time, other notable Sufi saints—such as Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya Mahbub e Ilahi, and Miran Sayyed Husain Khang Sawār—contributed hugely to shaping the Islamic faith and identity of the Meo people.

Some modern researchers also propose that the Meo community may have emerged from multiple caste backgrounds, not exclusively Rajput lineages. As various groups embraced Islam over several centuries, they gradually integrated into a cohesive community collectively known today as Meo.

arrangement for Islamic education or Islamic moral training was maintained there. As a result, despite living so close to the capital of the Muslim rule, all the traits of ancient paganism remained intact among them; and gradually they drifted so far away from Islam that, except for the belief that “we are Muslims,” nothing of Islam itself remained.

Even their names no longer resembled those of Muslims: they were known by names such as Nahar Singh, Bhoop Singh, Totru, and others of this kind. They kept *chotiyān* (tufts of hair on the head). Idols were worshipped among them. For their needs and desires, they would turn to their goddesses (*Naodhobillah*) whose worship their ancestors had practiced in ancient times.

They were so unfamiliar with Islam that ordinary villagers did not even know the *Kalima Tayyiba*. They were utterly unaware even of the form of prayer.⁴ If, by chance, a Muslim happened to pass through their area and performed his prayers, the men, women, and children of the village would gather around him in astonishment to see what he was doing. They would wonder whether the man was suffering from stomach pain, or whether he had gone mad—standing up and sitting down repeatedly, and bowing in that strange manner.

Along with this religious ignorance, all the rough and backward traits of pagan life were found among them. Their way of living was disorderly and spiritually empty, and they were unfamiliar even with the most basic ideas of purity. Men and women alike were scarcely clothed and lacked modesty.

⁴ Unfortunately, this remains the condition of many regions across the Muslim world today, where large numbers of people still lack even a basic understanding of Islam. This reality underscores the urgent need to reach out to them using the same compassionate, grassroots method employed by Maulana Ilyas—awakening faith, teaching fundamentals, and guiding communities through sincere and sustained transformation.

Theft, waylaying, robbery, and other crimes were common, and it was difficult for any traveler to pass safely through their area.

Among their tribes and clans, disputes would break out again and again over petty matters—just like the feuds you read about in the accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia. Their population was divided into different groups, and these groups would often fall into quarrels over a woman, an animal, or some other trivial cause—conflicts that would continue for years.

Thus, all the natural qualities of this hardworking, brave, and strong people were being wasted. Not only had they failed to retain any path toward their own progress and welfare, but they had also become a source of anxiety for their neighbors. Those who had experience administering this region admit that neither the British government nor the princely states of Alwar and Bharatpur were able to establish peace there or bring about improved social conditions.

Early Days of Tablighi Jamaat



Note:

At this point, we consider it important to present a brief early history of the Tablighi Jamaat, as it offers valuable insights for *da'wah* workers who may benefit from the beautiful practices and efforts of its founding period. This chapter **was not part of Maulana Maududi's original article**. It has been added solely to provide readers with context regarding the beginnings of the movement.

To clearly distinguish this supplementary material from the original text, we are presenting it **enclosed within a separate frame**.

Note from the editor:

People from Mewat often travelled to Delhi for work, and many of them would stop near the Nizamuddin mosque to rest and eat before moving on. Maulana Ilyas frequently saw these workers and, one day, approached them to ask about their lives and background. Through these conversations, he realised that although they called themselves Muslims, they had very little knowledge of basic Islamic beliefs and practices.

These encounters in Nizamuddin left a deep impression on him. Concerned by what he had learned, Maulana Ilyas made his first visit to Ferozepur Namak in Mewat in 1925. From the very beginning, he faced strong resistance. People threw stones at him, struck him with sticks, and forced him out of their villages. Despite this harsh treatment, he did not give up. He endured these hardships with

patience, thanking God for allowing him to face trials similar to those experienced by the prophets while calling people to the faith.

With each visit, he examined the conditions of the region more closely. Gradually, he became convinced that the Meo Muslims needed to be reconnected with Islamic teachings afresh and guided back towards a life shaped by genuine Islamic practice.

A panchayat was later held in Nuh, where a list of 103 individuals was put forward and 31 proposals were approved to establish the basic framework for the Jamaat's work. With this foundation in place, the Jamaat began regular outreach tours in 1926 to meet the people of Mewat and invite them towards Islam.

In the early stages, the preachers faced strong resistance in several villages. Many Meos rejected their message, but the workers tried to soften their hearts through humility and patience. They pleaded with those who did not pray to join them, showing such sincerity that they even placed their turbans at the villagers' feet, begging them to come to the mosque. This humble approach marked the true beginning of the Tablighi effort.

The first tour of the Tablighi Jamaat lasted three weeks. During this journey, the group visited numerous villages and offered Friday prayers in Sohna, Taoro, and Nagina in the Gurgaon district. Maulana Ilyas, along with several other scholars, joined these gatherings. They offered guidance and encouragement to the du'at (preachers), strengthening their resolve and deepening their sense of purpose in what they believed to be a noble mission.

After the first successful tour, Maulana Ilyas began organising many more teams of travelling Meo preachers and sending them throughout

the Mewati countryside. In 1932, he performed his third Hajj. When he returned from the Hijaz, he came back with renewed energy and an even stronger conviction in his mission. Inspired by the spiritual atmosphere of the holy cities, he set out again with greater determination.

Soon after returning, he led two extended tours through the Meo areas of Gurgaon and Faridabad. Each tour lasted nearly a month and included more than a hundred Meos and other workers. During these journeys, they preached Islam, encouraged people to reform their lives, and established new Jamaats across the region.

To organise the work more effectively, Maulana Ilyas had detailed maps prepared of the villages. These maps included distances between settlements and the names of influential local leaders whose cooperation would be important. Around this time, he also introduced important changes to the content of the Jamaats' work. In the beginning, the workers focused mainly on teaching the Kalima and prayer. Later, two more points were added: showing respect for fellow Muslims and maintaining dhikr - knowledge and remembrance of Allah. Now, he added two further principles –purifying one's intention and recognising that every Muslim has a duty to participate in Tabligh.

In the late 1920s, Maulana Ilyas began sending Jamaats to regions where Islamic practices were already more common. These groups of Meos made regular visits to such areas, teaching the Kalima and the method of prayer to local Muslims. During these tours, they also increased their own understanding of Islam by learning directly from the scholars of the centres they visited.

At first, some scholars looked down on them, seeing the Meo workers as uneducated villagers who were overstepping their limits by trying to preach to others. But as time passed, the efforts of these Meo Jamaats began to show clear results. Their sincerity and success in guiding local Muslims led many of these scholars to change their views and appreciate the value of their work.

In the winter of 1933, Maulana Ilyas brought more than two hundred Meo followers to Delhi. There, he and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani addressed them about the importance of Tabligh. After this gathering, several Jamaats were formed and sent to different regions.

One of these groups was instructed to travel to Thana Bhawan, the town of the renowned scholar—and Maulana Ilyas's own teacher—Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi. When Maulana Thanwi first heard about the arrival of the Jamaat, he felt uneasy. He feared that these Meo workers, being simple and uneducated villagers, might unintentionally create fitnah. But when a disciple informed him that they were only teaching the six points and encouraging people to pray, he invited them to join him for the next Jumu'ah prayer.

After the prayer, the Meos met Maulana Thanwi and explained the principles of Tabligh to him. They then took him along on a gasht. During this visit, Maulana Thanwi was shocked to discover that most local Muslims were not regular in their prayers, and many did not even know the Kalima. The Meo workers, however, continued their effort with great patience—calling people to the mosque and teaching them the basics of Islam.

Maulana Thanwi was deeply moved by their sincerity and hard work. He is reported to have said before a gathering in Thana Bhawan, *"If you want to see how the Companions were, look at these people."* After this

endorsement, the work of the Jamaat began to spread widely and rapidly.

By 1934, the Meo agrarian uprising had spread across the Meo-populated districts of Alwar and had even reached other parts of territory. Around the same time, the Arya Samaj had managed to convert tens of thousands of Malkana Muslims back to Hinduism and had begun serious efforts to extend their Shuddhi campaign into Mewat.

These developments greatly alarmed Maulana Ilyas. Fearing that the Meos might face the same fate as the Malkanas, he intensified his efforts to strengthen the Tablighi movement in the region. He warned that now that news of the Meos' return to Islam had begun to spread, others might try even harder to pull them away from the faith unless strong steps were taken immediately.

To strengthen his movement and counter the growing influence of the Arya Samaj, Maulana Ilyas convened a large Meo panchayat in Nuh in August 1934. More than a hundred prominent Meo figures – including landowners, community leaders, and title-holders – attended the gathering. By inviting these influential individuals, Maulana Ilyas hoped to guide the work of the movement through them, knowing that their support would help spread the message of Tabligh far and wide.

During the assembly, Maulana Ilyas asked these leaders to commit themselves to upholding and promoting the principles of Islam, to continue organising panchayats for religious reform, and to remain steadfast in this work for the rest of their lives. He then emphasised several key points that he expected them to follow and spread among their people:

- i. The Kalima
- ii. Performing the daily prayers
- iii. Learning and teaching Islamic knowledge
- iv. Adopting an Islamic appearance and dress
- v. Avoiding public mixing of men and women
- vi. Conducting marriages according to Islamic teachings
- vii. Encouraging Meo women to dress in a modest, Islamic manner
- viii. Remaining firm on Islamic beliefs and avoiding any other religious practices
- ix. Protecting each other's rights
- x. Ensuring that respected members of the community participate in all public gatherings
- xi. Prioritising basic Islamic education for children before any secular learning
- xii. Making an effort to spread the message of Islam
- xiii. Following Islamic customs and abandoning un-Islamic practices
- xiv. Maintaining cleanliness
- xv. Preserving each other's dignity and honour

These fifteen points were written down, and everyone present at the panchayat signed an agreement to follow them with full commitment.

The Nuh gathering gave a powerful boost to Maulana Ilyas's work in Mewat. In response to his invitation, many scholars from across northern India began travelling through Mewat. They addressed large Meo gatherings, encouraged religious learning, and supported the spread of Islamic teachings. At the same time, the activities of the Meo Jamaats increased significantly, both within Mewat and in

surrounding areas. Before long, the movement became deeply rooted among the Meo people.

This was the condition in Mewat when Maulana Maududi visited the region and documented his observations. The remarkable transformation he witnessed among the Meo people is described in the following chapter.

How Maulana Ilyas's Vision Transformed Mewat



In these circumstances, *Maulana Muhammad Ilyas* began his work there, and within the short span of ten or twelve years he transformed the condition of the greater part of this community.

Today, in that region, nearly two hundred and fifty madrasas have been established, where boys from the villages come to acquire basic knowledge of their religion.

For those who desire higher religious education, there is a madrasa in the blessed settlement of Hazrat Nizamuddin Mahbub-e-Ilahi, near Delhi – the very saint through whose early efforts Islam had first reached this community. In this madrasa, not only are the core Islamic sciences taught, but the students are also given pure religious *tarbiyyah* – spiritual nurturing, character building, and moral training. Furthermore, to provide practical experience in preaching and reform, they are sent to the surrounding villages to take part in actual *dawah* work.

Through the blessings of this madrasa, a considerable group of scholars and preachers has now emerged from within the Meo community itself – who, God willing, will serve as a guarantee for keeping this people steadfast on the path of religion.

The respected Maulana took the work of reform from the hands of the Meos themselves, and the result of their continuous efforts – which I have witnessed with my own eyes – is that in some areas there are entire villages where you will not find even a single child who neglects prayer. Those village mosques in which, in earlier times, people used to tie their cattle –

today, in those very mosques, the call to prayer is raised five times a day, and congregational prayers are performed regularly.

Stop any villager you meet along the way and test him: he will recite the *Kalima* to you with correct pronunciation. He will explain, in simple and straightforward terms—the very essence of Islamic teaching that a simple Bedouin-type common man ought to know—and he will tell you what the fundamental pillars of Islam are.

Now, you will not find any Muslim man, woman, or child there dressed in Hindu-style clothing; nor will you see their bodies uncovered; nor will you find their houses or garments polluted with impurities. Their habits, their traits, and their moral character have all undergone visible transformation through dawah, calling, reaching out, and preaching. They are now returning to a civilized and refined way of life. Crime has decreased in a remarkable manner. Fights, quarrels, and legal disputes have become very rare. Their region has now become a peaceful region—something even the local authorities themselves acknowledge.

In their social life, in their dealings, in their conduct—in short, in everything—there has been a tremendous change, through which a highly positive moral influence is now being exerted on the surrounding populations. They are no longer looked upon with contempt or distrust; rather, their honor is rising, and people have begun to rely on their integrity.

The Maulana has created among the ordinary villagers such a spirit of preaching, reform, and *amr bil-ma'ruf wa nahi 'anil-munkar* that those who were themselves astray only yesterday are now busy guiding others to the straight path. When they find a little time free from farming, small groups of these villagers set out from different settlements for preaching. They travel from village to village, inviting people towards righteousness and goodness. Their travel provisions and belongings are carried on their own shoulders.

They impose no burden on anyone, nor do they ask anything for themselves from anyone. Their sole objective is the pleasure of God, and they work selflessly for His sake. For this reason, wherever they go, they produce an extraordinary influence upon the inhabitants of villages and towns.

I learned that sometimes these people, while travelling on foot in their preaching rounds, go as far as *two hundred miles*, and every settlement through which they pass becomes illuminated with religious awakening and with the light of the *Kalima* and of prayer. I myself had the opportunity to speak with some of these what one would think *Bedouin-like* rustic preachers; and when, in their simple, straightforward language, I heard their aims and intentions, I felt as though the very spirit that had once stirred the Arabs of the early days of Islam – raising the Bedouins to spread the message of the Straight Path – was now being rekindled within these men.

I asked one illiterate farmer, “Why do you go on these tours?” He replied: “We were drowned in ignorance. We knew nothing of God, nor of His Messenger. May God bless that *maulvi* who showed us the straight path. Now we wish to convey this blessing – which has reached us – to our other brothers as well.”

Hearing these words, my eyes filled with tears. This was the very spirit with which the Companions had risen – overcome by a profound spiritual zeal and immersed in a sacred passion – and had risen in such a way that they were scarcely aware of their own bodies and selves.

This religious reform has also, to a great extent, removed the tribal fragmentation of the Meo community – an element that had long kept their collective strength scattered. In the villages, gatherings are held from time to time, in which people come from distances of twenty or twenty-five miles. Assemblies of eight to ten thousand people are formed. They sit together, learn the teachings of religion, and even their mutual disputes are settled on

the spot. The preaching groups that emerge from these villages not only spread the teachings of Islam, but at the same time, naturally establish bonds of mutual brotherhood and affection. In this way, tribal divisions are gradually giving way to a sense of national unity, and an organizational structure is coming into existence—one from which many future tasks can be accomplished. For what is organization except that large numbers of individuals gather at one call, and begin to move at one command! This very thing is beginning to take shape there, and has already developed to a considerable degree.

These admirable results, which have appeared within a count of only a few brief years, are nothing but the fruit of the labor and effort of a single sincere man. There is no committee there; no fundraising; no separate name for this movement; no membership drives; no wealthy patron behind it; no newspaper publicity; no parades of rules and uniforms and bands and flags; no display exhibitions. Their achievements are not trumpeted before the world. Quietly, a simple *maulvi*, sitting in a mosque, is doing his work. This poor man knows nothing of the modern Western methods of display and propaganda, nor has he ever felt any need to beat the drum of his accomplishments before the world. It is a pure religious zeal that drives him to this work, and an unbroken devotion that keeps him engaged day and night.

This is precisely why the strong and lasting results achieved by this one sincere man have not been matched even today by many large organisations or by the loud and showy movements whose names fill the newspapers day and night. In the Islamic history of India, a movement of this nature was either first raised by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, the Mujaddid of the second millennium (ؒ), or later revived by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (ؒ); and now it is Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (may Allah bless him) whom God has granted the opportunity to renew it once more.

Key Lessons We Can Learn from This Effort



Note from the editor:

It is important to remember that 1939 was a period in which Maulana Maududi was critically examining the religious movements active in India. During this time, he also observed the Tablighi Jamaat and identified several valuable practices in their work – practices that he later incorporated into the methodology of Jamaat-e-Islami.

The analysis presented in this chapter reflects his thinking before the establishment of Jamaat-e-Islami. Here, Maulana Maududi outlines the reasons he believed many organizations and movements of that era had failed to bring about real and lasting reform. His reflections, together with the experiences and insights he gained in the following two years, ultimately played an important role in the formation of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941.

My purpose in describing the circumstances of this movement is *not* that an announcement which has not been made publicly until now should become an advertisement today. Rather, through this account, I wish to draw the attention of those people – who do not seek display, and who sincerely desire to render some real service to the religion and the community – to a few important matters:

(1) The Essential Starting Point for Religious Renewal

At this moment, the condition in which the Muslims of India generally find themselves demands that they be called anew towards Islam – that they be

made Muslim once again in the very manner in which the Prophet (ﷺ) made the Arabs into Muslims. Their moral decline, their indifference to religion, their neglect of the injunctions of Islam, the dissipation of their energies, the disorder in their thinking, their wandering upon different paths, and their running after any caller without distinguishing between leader and misleader – all of these are but consequences of one underlying reality: they have moved away from the center of *La ilaha illa Allah*.

Our fundamental mistake – the mistake because of which all our beneficial efforts fail – is that we are deceived by the word “Muslim” which is applied to them. We imagine them to be real and true Muslims, and then expect from them the kind of conduct that true Muslims ought to display. We place before them the commands of God and His Messenger, hoping they will submit to these commands in the manner proper to a Muslim. But in truth, they are not the addressees of these commands; rather, they are the addressees of the *Kalima Tayyiba*. The *Kalima La ilaha illa Allah* has not yet entered their hearts – so how, then, can the obedience to commandments, and the distinctively Muslim way of life that should flow from it, manifest in them?

The conduct that flows purely from belief in this *Kalima* can only manifest when a person truly embraces it. The foremost reason for *Maulana Muhammad Ilyas*’s success is precisely this: he began his work with the preaching of the *Kalima Tayyiba*.⁵ Then, those who accepted it went on to

⁵ Maulana Maududi firmly believed that genuine religious reform must begin with a fresh and conscious reconnection to the *Kalimah*. He upheld this principle at the time of the formation of Jamaat-e-Islami as well. When the Jamaat was established, every person who joined it recited the *Kalimah* and “became Muslim anew” – meaning that they renewed their faith with full awareness, intention, and commitment.

The *Roodād* (official history) of Jamaat-e-Islami, Volume 1, describes what unfolded during the Jamaat’s foundational gathering after Maulana Maududi read out the newly prepared constitution. The following overview summarises the events of that historic moment:

obey every command that was conveyed to them from God and His Messenger ﷺ. In reality, these people are *new Muslims*, and it is the very nature of a new Muslim that he consciously and deliberately fulfils the demands of the belief he has embraced with willingness and eagerness.

Therefore, for those who desire the revival of the religion, there is no alternative except to abandon the method of assuming Muslims to be actual Muslims and thereby attempting to lead them to higher stages. Rather, they must begin anew, from the first step, by preaching the religion afresh among them.

(2) Begin with Local Work

The present circumstances are not suitable for establishing an all-India organization and undertaking work through a centralized system. For now, the correct approach is that each person should begin the task of making the people of his own surroundings, his own area, or his own tribe into true Muslims. He should define a circle of work for himself according to the religious strength and capability that he possesses within himself.

To attempt work on a scale larger than one's ability only scatters a person's energies, and in striving for the whole, even a small portion remains

After that, Maulana Maududi stood up and recited the Kalimat ash-Shahādah:

"Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh, wa ashhadu anna Muḥammadan Rasūlullāh."

"I testify that there is no god except Allah, and I testify that Muhammad ﷺ is the Messenger of Allah."

He then said, "O people! Bear witness that I reaffirm my īmān and join Jamaat-e-Islami." After this, Maulana Muhammad Manzoor Nomani stood up and, like Maulana Maududi, announced the reaffirmation of īmān. Following him, people from the gathering rose one by one, recited the Shahādah, and joined the Jamaat. Most of them were in tears, and some nearly fell unconscious from weeping. Almost everyone trembled with a deep sense of responsibility as they renewed their testimony of faith. When the people finished reciting the Shahādah, Maulana Maududi declared, "Jamaat-e-Islami is now established! Come, let us pray to Rabb al-'Ālamīn that He grant our Jamaat firmness and steadfastness, and bless us to follow our Book and our Prophet ﷺ."

incomplete. Therefore, sincere workers should form small circles in various places and begin their work there. If sincerity is truly at work and personal desires do not interfere, then in time these small circles will naturally come together to form a larger system. The insistence on preserving one's own – or one's circle's – separate identity remains only where some trace of ego still exists.⁶

(3) Avoiding Unnecessary Labels

There is no need for “association-making” (*anjuman-bāzī*). To work under a separate name is not beneficial but harmful; for, unconsciously, it creates the mentality among people that they are entering not into Islam, but into some organization bearing a particular name. Therefore, it is best that people be invited plainly and simply towards Islam itself – the original and true community – and that when they enter it, they be made to understand that:

“There is no difference between you and the common Muslims except that you are conscious Muslims, while they remain Muslims without awareness. Your duty is to share with them the blessing of conscious Islam, so that your community may expand.”⁷

⁶ This approach can be compared to spreading seeds across different fields. When the plants begin to sprout in various places, they can later be brought together and aligned within a central effort. In this way, the workers in smaller circles or units are not overwhelmed by responsibilities beyond their capacity.

When these circles and units eventually integrate with the central structure, it creates unity of vision, strengthens cooperation, and gives the overall effort a clearer and more focused direction. All of this, however, depends on people, circles, and units, coming together with sincerity and setting aside individual ego.

⁷ In the understanding of the translator and editor, Maulana Maududi is not arguing that organizations should not exist at all, nor is he suggesting that there should be no leadership, no discipline, or that people should act however they wish, whenever they wish, and in whatever manner they prefer. Rather, he is emphasising that when giving someone the *initial* invitation, it should not be an invitation to join an organisation. It should be a call directed purely towards the **Kalimah** and towards a life of sincerity, purity, and conscious faith. Only after a person accepts this foundational transformation should the distinction

It is evident that when people join a community in this manner, a natural organizational structure (*nazmī hay'at*) begins to form within them by itself; and naturally, the one who first calls them becomes their leader. In such a case, a practical organization will arise that is better than any formally constituted committee — *on the condition that the leader himself does not desire to establish his own leadership*, but allows leadership to grow in the same natural manner as a tree grows from a seed.

(4) Avoiding Showmanship: Returning to the Prophetic Method

Similarly, it is not appropriate to follow those display-oriented methods that have now become widespread and have, in general, cast a spell over people's minds. Nowadays, people have begun to imagine that flags and hollow slogans, uniforms, drills, parades on the streets, and mock battles — whose collective name has been given as “military organization” — are essential for success, because these are the things that attract the masses and through which thousands upon thousands of people can be gathered.

Likewise, the notion has taken root that anyone who runs a movement must necessarily have a newspaper through which he constantly informs the outside world of his achievements: how many thousands of pamphlets he has published in so many languages; or that in such-and-such place an old woman's house was on fire and his “servants of the people” reached there and poured so many buckets of water; or that the number of his followers is increasing at such-and-such a rate; or that in various places his workers are

between conscious and unconscious Muslims — and the responsibilities that arise from this awareness — be explained.

Maulana Maududi later clarifies in the same article that, once this foundational individual work is complete, the larger structure of *dīn* — its system, mission, and collective responsibilities — must then be built upon it, addressing all areas of life. Organized work is inevitable for the success of such efforts. He also stresses that no organization should call people towards a *sect*, but only towards pure Islam.

This principle was central to the formation of Jamaat-e-Islami as well. Maulana Maududi named it the “Jamaat of Islam,” meaning the group that calls towards Islam itself, not towards any sectarian identity.

performing such-and-such services. If the world is not informed of all this, it is assumed that all one's efforts have gone to waste⁸.

Some contemporary movements have cast such a spell upon people's minds that even certain sincere individuals, when they intend to begin any work, find their minds involuntarily drawn towards this very pattern of activity. But I wish to inform them that this has never been the method of sincere workers, nor can any solid work in the world be accomplished in this manner.

Stand in the marketplace wearing a tall, pointed cap and ring a bell. In no time, a crowd will gather around you. But can such a crowd – assembled in this way – be used for anything more than selling a few compounds you have prepared and presented as cures for their illnesses?⁹ From this example, understand that the noise produced by spectacle-loving people through showy devices can never become a force that transforms the world.¹⁰

For that, the only correct method is the one followed by the Prophets (peace be upon them all): that a person, purely for the pleasure of God, applies himself with full devotion, remains firm in his place without being swayed from his mission, and quietly continues the work of preaching and reform –

⁸ This point is essentially about maintaining the correct focus. If an organisation shifts its attention away from genuine work and begins prioritising publicity, display, or activities that serve worldly benefits or feed personal ego, then such an organisation will inevitably fall far from real success. However, if certain efforts are publicised solely to advance the mission further – where the purpose is not self-promotion but the promotion of the work itself so that it may spread and grow – then this does not fall under the criticism mentioned here. And Allah knows best.

⁹ This used to be a common tactic among street sellers and tricksters: they would attract crowds by showing off their tricks, win people's applause, and then collect the coins that were thrown to them after the performance.

¹⁰ This highlights that our aim should not be to gather people through displays, techniques, or superficial attractions. The real focus must remain on sincere work and on engaging sincere individuals – people who can carry the mission forward with integrity and become true bearers of its banner.

gradually touching people's hearts and transforming their lives. Through years of steady and patient effort, he prepares a group of Muslims who—though small in number—are enriched with the strength of faith and righteous action.

It is in such individuals that the warmth of conviction, the firmness of character, and the steadfast habits of disciplined and orderly action—born of their strict adherence to the Shariah—take root. This is the true spirit of activism. And *this* is the activism that we truly require.

(5) Working With the Masses

As for working among the masses, in my view the best method—and the one closest to the method of the Prophets—is the very method through which *Maulana Muhammad Ilyas* has carried out his work. Those who wish to work along this line, I would advise them to go to the Maulana, observe the manner in which he works, assist his preachers, learn through practical experience, and then begin preaching and reform in their own regions following the same pattern.

One thing that must be firmly borne in mind regarding this method is that in the beginning one has to work with great patience. Here, mustard seeds do not sprout in the palm of the hand.¹¹ Sometimes years pass merely in producing a few capable workers, and repeatedly a person feels his heart breaking with the thought that his mission has failed. Only after passing through these hardships does success begin to appear.

¹¹ This refers to the well-known Urdu idiom "*Hatheli par sarson jamana*" — meaning "*to expect mustard seeds to sprout on one's palm.*" The idiom conveys the idea of expecting something extremely difficult, impossible, or naturally time-consuming to happen instantly, without allowing it the time and process it requires.

Maulana is highlighting that one should not fall into this kind of thinking when working for the transformation of nations. Such change cannot be forced or rushed. It unfolds gradually, following its natural course, and requires patience, persistence, and consistent effort over time.

(6) The Advantage of Working in Rural Communities

Those who wish to work among the common people will find rural areas far more suitable than cities. The temperament of our urban populations has been greatly corrupted by the sudden, short-lived movements that are now spreading like a *pandemic*. Because of these movements, people have become accustomed to display, showmanship, and commotion. They are scarcely inclined towards any movement that pays more attention to their inner selves than their outward appearances, and that seeks to transform them from within and create a firm character.

Therefore, it is best for now to leave the cities to their own condition and focus on reforming the rural populations, where simple-natured and impressionable people are still to be found.¹² However, if anyone sees a

¹² This was Maulana's assessment based on the conditions of his time. However, even today there remains a vast and vital opportunity to work among the common people of villages and remote areas. Focusing on cities alone will never be sufficient—especially when urban populations are constantly exposed to corrupted ideas, media influences, and misleading ideologies day after day. Rural communities, by contrast, continue to offer fertile ground for sincere and transformative work.

No matter which country one visits, some of the purest, simplest, and most genuine people are often found in villages or smaller towns. The editor of this book has personally witnessed numerous experiences that reinforce this understanding.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal said:

فطرت کے مقاصد کی کرتا ہے نگہبانی

یا بندہ صحرائی یا مرد کستانی

He guards the sacred aims that Nature keeps in trust —
The desert-dwelling soul, or the mountaineer robust.

دنیا میں محاسب ہے تہذیب فصول گر کا

ہے اس کی فقیہی میں سرمایہ سلطانی

genuine opportunity for success in the cities in his particular circumstances, he should not hesitate to make use of it.

(7) Carrying Islam's Universal Message to All Humanity

Those who work among the masses must keep in mind that the message of Islam is not restricted to those who are born of Muslim ancestry; rather, it is a universal message meant for all human beings. Therefore, they must carry this message to non-Muslims as well. But in order to bring non-Muslims into the fold of Islam, three things are necessary:

- **First:** *We must remove those obstacles because of which strong prejudices against Islam have taken root among non-Muslims. The political, economic, and social rivalries that have arisen between Muslims and non-Muslims under the influence of British rule have deeply penetrated village life. Daily conflicts of interest and continual struggles have created such hostility between the two groups that they have become like opposing camps. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to convey the message of Islam to ordinary*

In this world, he stands the judge of sorcery-stricken art;
His beggar's cloak holds hidden a sovereign ruler's heart.

یہ حسن و لطافت کیوں؟ وہ قوت و شوکت کیوں

بلبل چمنستانی، شہباز بیابانی!

Why this grace and tenderness? Why that power and pride?
The garden's gentle nightingale... the wilderness' soaring guide!

اے شج! بہت اچھی مکتب کی فضا، لیکن

بنتی ہے بیاباں میں فاروقی و سلمانی

O Shaykh! Your school's atmosphere is pleasant, pure, and bright —
Yet Farooq's flame and Salman's soul are forged in deserts' night.

non-Muslims, because the doors of their hearts have been locked against this message.

Those who wish to fulfill the duty of preaching the truth must first find the key to this lock. And that key is nothing other than reducing the rivalries, enmities, and tensions that have developed between Muslims and non-Muslims. Among Muslims, a general mindset should be cultivated that their organization and reform is not meant to prepare them for national competition against their non-Muslim neighbors; rather, its purpose is to make Muslims truly Muslim, and to convey the blessing of Islam to others.

In every Muslim, sentiments of justice, generosity, compassion, and gentleness should be nurtured. He should look upon non-Muslims with the understanding that they are our brothers who suffer from spiritual and moral illness; and our duty is not to leave them sick and avoid them, but to save them from illness and join them among the healthy.

- **Second:** *The moral character, dealings, and way of life of ordinary Muslims must be so elevated* that merely by observing them, every person whose nature contains even the slightest ability to appreciate goodness, truth, righteousness, justice, noble conduct, cleanliness, and purity of life will be impressed. If such qualities arise in the general Muslim population, and the non-Muslim residents begin to find the Muslims morally superior to themselves, then believe me, there will be no need to even invite them verbally to Islam. All those in whom there is any love for truth (and which nation is without such people?) will naturally wish to join that community whose principles raise human beings so high and so noble.

Therefore, Muslims must develop the mindset that at every moment they are representatives of Islam, and in every matter of life they must act with the awareness that from their every action people form an opinion about the truth or falsehood of Islam.

- **Third:** Among ordinary Muslims, those notions of high-and-low status and ritual pollution that have arisen under Hindu influence must be uprooted. They should be prepared to accept every Muslim – whatever his social background – on a completely equal footing within their social order, and not practice any kind of discrimination against him; nor should they hesitate even in forming marital connections with him.¹³

(8) Beyond Personal Reform: The Next Stage of the Mission

Note from the editor:

What this section covers is the very point that distinguished Jamaat-e-Islami from other organizations: its conception of Islam as a *complete way of life* – one that extends far beyond personal reform and encompasses every aspect of society. Personal reform is simply the entry point into the broader effort of Iqāmat-e-Dīn. Without this foundation, the establishment of the Deen remains only an aspiration, never a reality.

This is also the beautiful juncture where two types of efforts meet and complement each other: the work of transforming individuals, and the work of building a just and comprehensive Islamic social order. One prepares the ground; the other raises the structure.

¹³ Through Maulana Ilyas's efforts, most remnants of Hindu-influenced customs were removed from the character of the Mewati Muslims – except one: the reluctance to marry outside one's caste. Unfortunately, this tendency is still found among many clans today, who regard it as inappropriate for someone of another caste to enter into marital relations within their clan.

Yet in the sight of Allah (SWT), all people are equal, and true superiority belongs only to those who possess greater *taqwā* (God-consciousness). Lineage, caste, or clan hold no value before Him. This lingering attachment to caste hierarchy is a false idol – one that many contemporary societies urgently need to break.

It should not be imagined that merely reforming the religious and moral condition of the people, and establishing an Islamic communal order, is the final stage at which our work ends. Rather, it should be understood that this is only the first stage, and that after traversing it, the path for further progress opens up.

Faith in the *Kalima Tayyiba*, the gathering of scattered energies around this central point, and the formation within people – through adherence to the Shariah – of disciplined, orderly habits and traits: these are in reality the acts that level the ground so that a structure may be erected upon it. When such ground becomes level – as it has now in the region of Mawat – then there arises an opportunity for those who have learned the modern methods of administration of human affairs. They should go there and cooperate with the religious reformers.

They should spread the light of *knowledge* in that region. They should create *political* awareness and consciousness among the common people. They should strive to improve their *economic* condition and construct, upon Islamic principles, a new system of *finance*. In short, from various angles they should set these people upon the path of progress, and they should not rest until they have brought them to such a strong and well-organized condition that the natural result becomes this: that God honors them with His *khilāfah*, and they become rightful inheritors of the earth (not usurping proprietors).

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ مُحَمَّدٍ



SAMA O BASR
A PROJECT OF ICAN